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Spectral Resemblances and Elusive Connections:
A Practice-led Research Dialogue between
Poetry and Digital Imagery

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Abstract

In the early 20th century the function of poetic imagery was given international attention through the Imagist movement in London and, ever since, many poets have self-consciously employed and exploited imagist techniques. At the same time poets and visual artists have frequently explored connections between each other's works considering, as Art Berman writes, that "the visual can provide direct and even prelinguistic knowledge since the psyche presumably has operations that precede or take logical precedence over [...] language" (49).

Interart comparisons suggest that poetry and the visual arts can be talked about as if "work in one medium [...] were operating in another" (Dayan 3). However, it is often unclear what it might mean to describe a work of visual art as "poetic" or a poem as "visual." This paper explores these ideas with reference to Paul Hetherington's and Anita Fitton's practice-led research project, *Spectral Resemblances*.

The project is investigating some of the ways in which written poetry and still visual imagery may convey related meanings. It asks whether meaningful connections between poetic and visual imagery are at best "spectral" and elusive. It explores how the juxtapositioning of complementary works in these different media may allow resonances to play back and forth in the conceptual spaces between them.

Keywords: Imagery, poetry, interart, digital, indeterminate, spectral, resemblances

1. Twentieth and twenty-first-century poetry and the image

Literature and the visual arts have often been claimed as bedfellows. Since the early 20th century, with the advent of modernism, visual artists and poets have often made reference to one another. Peter Halter observes that the

formation of Modernism in general and of Modernist literature in particular, took place in a cultural climate that was characterized by an unprecedented collaboration between painters, sculptors, writers, musicians, and critics on both sides of the Atlantic. (1)

He claims that William Carlos Williams may well be “the paradigmatic case” of such cross-fertilisation but there are many other examples of writers who were influenced by the visual arts, among them Ezra Pound.

One of Pound’s poems, “L’Art, 1910” was presumably written in response to the “Manet and the Post-Impressionists” exhibition held in London in that year (Nadel 226) and the poem demonstrates the way in which writers were being challenged to make verbal images out of the imagery they discovered in contemporary painting:

L’Art 1910

Green arsenic smeared on an egg-white cloth,
Crushed strawberries! Come, let us feast our eyes. (*Personae* 124)

Certainly, this was a time when the significance of art of all kinds was questioned and re-evaluated and when many artists expressed skepticism about traditional artistic modes and forms.

A variety of sometimes short-lived artistic and cultural movements emerged, such as cubism, Dada and surrealism, that presented new and often disturbing visions – not just for poetry and the visual arts but, in some cases, for culture and society as a whole. It was a period, as Art Berman writes, that saw an increased interest in the idea that “the visual can provide direct and even prelinguistic knowledge, since the psyche presumably has operations that precede or take logical precedence over the formation of language” (49). The role of imagery in poetry was

foregrounded by this attention to visual perception and Berman notes that in poetry “a theory of metaphor-as-truth ma[de] vision logically prior to expression: metaphor is image-ry” (49).

In this context, artists working in one medium often looked to their counterparts in other artistic mediums for fresh ideas, for inspiration and for new ways of thinking about and approaching their artistic practice. Rebecca Beasley comments that during the early 20th century, “speculations about the representational power of language were widespread” (52) and Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux observes that “[t]he twentieth century’s various pan-arts avant-gardes and their multi-disciplinary manifestos (Dada, vorticism, futurism, surrealism) speak to this energising banding together [of artists and poets]” (2-3). Many creative writers no longer appeared confident about how they should proceed unless they could anchor their work in what they could see, either in the world around them or in the imagery of the visual arts. Loizeaux observes that 20th-century poets have written ekphrastic poems – poems about works of art – in such numbers that “If the record of ekphrastic production can be a measure, images are more urgent [for poets] in the twentieth century than ever before” (2).

The Imagist movement emerged in London just prior to the First World War as a result of the writing and activities of T.E. Hulme, F.S. Flint, Hilda Doolittle, Richard Aldington and Ezra Pound, among others – initiated, in practice, by T.E. Hulme through the publication of the poems “Autumn” and “A City Sunset” in January 1909 (Jones 15). Michael Davidson writes that when “Ezra Pound set down his famous Imagist tenets of 1913, it was precisely to excoriate the ‘perdamnable rhetoric’ of the 1890s in England” (10).

Pound’s tenets were contained in a note entitled “Imagisme,” published in the journal *Poetry* and purportedly drafted by F.S. Flint (Rainey 94). One tenet was “Direct treatment of the ‘thing’, whether subjective or objective” (Flint 199) and in arriving at these tenets – as well being influenced by French Symbolist poetry of the late 19th century (Hughes 6-9) – Pound was influenced by and referenced the visual arts. In his 1913 essay, “The Serious Artist” he states that “By good art I mean art that bears true witness, I mean the art that is most precise. You can be

wholly precise in representing a vagueness [...] If you cannot understand this with regard to poetry, consider the matter in terms of painting” (162). Loizeaux comments that “Imagism developed by implicit analogy to the visual arts in desiring the instantaneous revelation the visual image is thought to have” (3).

Pound’s interest in Imagism also derived from his fascination with imagistic Japanese verse forms, such as the Haiku, which resulted in his two-lined poem “In a Station at the Metro.” Pound said of the making of this poem:

That evening, in the Rue Raynouard, I realized quite vividly that if I were a painter, or if I had, often, *that kind* of emotion, or even if I had the energy to get paints and brushes and keep at it, I might found a new school of painting, of “non-representative” painting, a painting that would speak only by arrangements in colour. (“Vorticism” 465; emphasis original)

He printed early versions of “In a Station of the Metro” with spaces between its key phrases and words, emphasising the extent to which he conceived of this poem in pictorial terms. Willard Bohn writes of this version that “[l]ike the faces in the crowd, the petals were suggested by the words’ appearance on the page” (33):

The apparition of these faces in the crowd :
Petals on a wet, black bough .
(Ruthven 152)

Pound’s reading of Chinese T’ang Dynasty poetry, filtered through “the posthumous notes of an American [Ernest Fenollosa] learning from a Japanese” (Alexander 97) also reflected this interest in the pictorial qualities of poetry. Pound was significantly influenced by Fenollosa’s idiosyncratic ideas about the pictorial qualities of Chinese “ideograms” – in Michael Alexander’s words, the idea that “the Chinese script is by its very nature more concrete and poetic than alphabetic writing: reading the character for sunset, the Chinese actually sees the descending sun tangled in a tree’s branches” (98):

It speaks at once with the vividness of painting, and with the mobility of sounds. It is, in some sense, more objective than either, more dramatic. In reading Chinese we do not seem to be juggling mental counters, but to be watching *things* work out their own fate. (Fenollosa and Pound 45; emphasis original)

In other words, Pound, and Imagism as a movement, were deeply influenced by the idea that words were things – objects and pictures – as well as being words.

All of this is to say that Imagism, one of the 20th and 21st centuries' most influential – if officially short-lived – poetic movements was further evidence of the way in which many early modernist poets wanted to “see” or visualise the world in their work through imagery. This tendency to look for visual imagery in poetry has continued into the 21st century and has become so pervasive that Peter Jones's statement from the 1970s might equally be applied to 21st-century poetry: “The truth is that imagistic ideas still lie at the centre of our poetic practice” (14).

Evidence of the preoccupation of contemporary poets with imagery is everywhere, including the fame of poems such as William Carlos Williams' “The Red Wheelbarrow,” from 1923, which is almost entirely a composite verbal image (Williams 57) and the influence of T.S. Eliot's imagistic “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (Eliot 11-16). Although, as Martin Scofield writes, Eliot “dissociated himself from the Imagist movement proper,” Scofield also observes that “[s]omething of the Imagist clarity and concentration can be seen in Eliot's first two volumes and in *The Waste Land* [...] the description of the fog as a cat in ‘Prufrock’ is virtually a little self-contained Imagist poem” (39).

Later in the 20th century poets such as Robert Bly and James Wright made their names partly as a result of their involvement with the Deep Image movement (Beach 179-85). They wrote poems that were in a direct line of descent from poets such as T.E. Hulme – even if Bly and others wanted to claim that “the Deep Image poem could be distinguished from the Imagism of the 1910s and 1920s by its use of the image to enact ‘psychic leaps’ between the conscious and the unconscious” (Beach 179).

The third part of the poem “Driving Toward the Lac Qui Parle River” is a well-known example of Bly's attempts to make such psychic

leaps. The poem is intensely metaphorical in a way that is both “beautiful and jarring to reason” (Nelson 20), creating a sense of an unspoken and only partly apprehended mystery. It achieves this effect partly through its intensely pictorial quality, “showing” the reader the poem’s landscape in apparently specific detail. Yet, on close examination, the detail proves to be tantalisingly opaque – and, in some respects, almost surrealistic. As a result, and despite its apparent precision, the poem’s meanings are to a significant extent indeterminate:

Nearly to Milan, suddenly a small bridge,
And water kneeling in the moonlight.
In small towns the houses are built right on the ground;
The lamplight falls on all fours on the grass.
When I reach the river, the full moon covers it.
A few people are talking, low, in a boat. (Bly 20)

Imagist techniques have also been very influential in Australian poetry in recent decades – to the extent that they remain one of the defining characteristics of contemporary poetic practice by both established and emerging writers. For example, Claire Potter’s first book-length collection, *Swallow* contains a number of imagistic poems, including “Old Bee Farm.” In this we read of “lids she opened and closed gentle as damaged shutters / thatched choirs of bees hung unwoken from sleep” (42). Multiple award-winning poet, Judith Beveridge’s “Orb Spider” opens with the lines, “I saw her, pegging out her web / thin as a pressed flower in the bleaching light” (Beveridge 18).

Such imagist techniques make connections between things that are usually unconnected and, as they do so, they hope to establish new relationships and meanings – and to make the reader “see” things freshly. This is exactly what T.E. Hulme achieved in his famous poem, “Autumn” in 1909:

Autumn

A touch of cold in the Autumn night –
I walked abroad,
And saw the ruddy moon lean over a hedge
Like a red-faced farmer.

I did not stop to speak, but nodded,
And round about were the wistful stars
With white faces like town children. (Jones 48)

In this early imagist poem, the pictorial quality of the writing is already tied to a sense of defamiliarisation. In particular, the stars' white faces "like town children" are a disturbing, rather spectral presence in the poem.

2. Searching for interart connections

The connection between poetry and visual imagery has frequently been emphasised by artists and writers when they have referenced sister art forms in trying to express the qualities of particular artworks. For example, James Cahill dedicates a monograph to the exploration of "poetic painting" in China and Japan. Kathryn Porter Aichele discusses Paul Klee's interest in "adapting poetic language to visual images" (6). And Peter Dayan's recent book, *Art as Music, Music as Poetry, Poetry as Art* explicitly claims that just as the visual arts can be "poetic" and poetry can be "imagistic," so different kinds of artistic expression are in many ways powerfully connected. In expressing what he calls a 20th-century "interart aesthetic" – which he acknowledges does not apply equally to all artists – he asserts that:

The only way to convey the incalculable relations that pertain between works, or between media, is to describe work in one medium as if it were operating in another – as if all the arts worked in the same way. Art as poetry, poetry as music, music as art and so on, round all possible permutations. That is the interart analogy. (3)

Mona Sandqvist has taken this concept further, invoking "a conception of the universe, where all is interrelated, and where everything belongs to a fundamental unity" (269) and Eli Rozik writes that "verbal and iconic metaphors share a common deep structure" (291). Ann Marie Seward Barry contends that

the connection between written language and visual pictures is an intimate one. Verbal language is essentially a linear system imposed on nonlinear experience. A static system, its link with creativity and the dynamical

process of experience is through verbal imagery, which connects it to the nonlinear systems of art and perception. Visual imagery, the first written language is closely associated with direct perception and experience. (107)

Despite such assertions, attempts to find “poetry” in works of visual art or to connect imagery in visual art to poetic imagery continues to be fraught with difficulty. Even the highly finessed visual imagery in the poems by Ezra Pound and William Bly that we have quoted are apprehended primarily as words rather than pictures even if, at times, such verbal imagery may be argued to have something of the same effect on a reader as the effect of pictorial images of similar scenes on a viewer.

Some poets have tried to counteract the separation of word and image by making their poems into actual pictures, perhaps most notably in so-called “concrete” poetry – and, more recently, in various kinds of multimedia and internet poetry – but such activities often demonstrate that pictures and words are unlike one another, however happily they may be combined. If, in imagistic terms, words are enough, why try to make actual pictures out of them? Poets who use words to construct shapes or pictures on a page often end up with something that is neither a sophisticated work of visual art nor a well-shaped poem.

A concrete poem that works well poetically is George Herbert’s famous early example, “Easter Wings” (63), yet the arrangement of the words of the poem into a picture of two wings – while emphasising the devotional aspect of the work – is potentially distracting to the reader who, in many editions, has to turn the poem sideways in order to read it. Although some of Guillaume Apollinaire’s concrete poems in *Calligrammes* are more successful – especially works such as “La Cravate et la Montre” (“The Tie and the Watch”) and “Il Pleut” (“It’s Raining”) (78-79; 100-101) – even these works have considerable limitations if viewed only in visual terms. Their chief effects derive from a nuanced and ironised interplay of word and image.

The act of making pictures out of the words of poems recognises that one of the persistent difficulties with visualising poetic imagery is that it can be elusive. Poems rarely provide extended detail in the verbal images they present and consequently a great deal is left to the reader. When Robert Bly writes: “Nearly to Milan, suddenly a small bridge, / And

water kneeling in the moonlight” (20), most readers can imagine this bridge and “see” the water that Bly mentions, but each reader will imagine the scene at least a little differently from other readers – and differently, too, from the way Bly “saw” it.

For the purposes of the poem, this does not matter because as it notices the world through an evocative accumulation of imagery, part of its purpose is to convey the mysteriousness of much of human experience. The images have denotative force – naming and describing a place that includes a small bridge, water and moonlight – but their primary power comes from their never fully explained connotative meanings, especially those activated by the verb “kneeling.” This verb does not so much anthropomorphise the water as invest it with a sense of mysterious, unexplained significance, like a kind of haunting.

While works of visual art often deliver more detailed imagery than poetry, it is worth remembering that many works of visual art are also elusive – even figurative and representational works. A famous example is Giorgione’s *Tempesta* (c. 1508). James Elkins writes of this painting that

it has a long list of puzzled interpreters, going back nearly a hundred years. Antonio Morassi was the first to suggest the painting might not only be puzzling, but also a deliberate enigma [...] The *Tempesta* is neither a proper jigsaw puzzle nor a well-behaved ambiguity, and its failure to conform is a sign of the apparent absence of a primary meaning. (103-106)

For Elkins, the hugely divergent range of interpretations of this work reflects Giorgione’s engagement with “the idea of *poesie* – roughly speaking, [paintings as] poetic utterances with a surplus of nuance and a paucity of overt symbolism” (109). Although *Tempesta* is from the early 16th century, it is a good example of how certain works of art in any period may seem almost infinitely suggestive and replete with indeterminate and multiplying meanings.

This sense that many, and even the main meanings of artworks exist beyond any self-contained denotative content has been highly influential for more than a century. E.H. Gombrich’s comment on Impressionist painting makes the point nicely:

It is the point of impressionist painting that the direction of the brushstroke is no longer an aid to the reading of forms. It is without any support from structure that the beholder must mobilize his memory of the visible world and project it into the mosaic of strokes and dabs on the canvas before him [...] The image, it might be said, has no firm anchorage left on the canvas – it is only “conjured up” in our minds. (169)

The use by painters such as Giorgione of the concept of “poesie” to name a tendency towards a relatively unanchored, nuanced and often ambiguous or enigmatic suggestiveness prefigured many of the interests and preoccupations of modernist and postmodern poets. For example, while it is impossible to fully summarise the multifarious and diverse tendencies of postmodern poetry, James McCorkle neatly pinpoints a number of key issues. He writes that “postmodern poetry rejects the notion of an autonomous poem, self, or culture; while truth or identity can not be anchored, the poem offers through its very inception the possibility of transformation” (43). In practice, a great deal of contemporary poetry emphasises that works of art are to a significant extent indeterminate; that they constitute no final statement and no final form of utterance.

Related ideas have influenced a great deal of 20th- and 21st-century artistic practice, including the way that theorists have conceptualised the visual arts. Peter Dallow argues that

One way art can usefully be thought of is as an indeterminate condition, a threshold between conscious thought and unconscious feeling, an opening onto a liminal space where rationality (theory) and irrationality (experience, emotion, art) mix in the individual creative act (practice). It appears to offer a doorway beyond mere perception, an opening onto the imperceptible. (46)

However suggestive Dallow’s statement may be, it is difficult to identify the “imperceptible” in art, or to approach the “threshold between conscious thought and unconscious feeling.” Yet we wished to try to do so and it is in the context of such ideas that in 2011 we began to conceive of and develop our practice-led interart project, *Spectral Resemblances*.

3. Spectral resemblances

The Spectral Resemblances project juxtaposes and links poems by Hetherington and (usually) abstract still digital images by Fitton that “resemble” one another through various forms of suggestiveness and connotation and which give prominence to the interplay of imagery, light and shadow. In creating pairs of complementary images and poems our project investigates some of the ways in which different art forms may convey related meanings and make certain kinds of connections.

We began the project by discussing a selection of Hetherington’s existing poetry – concentrating on works with readily identifiable visual imagery – and Fitton’s published work as a digital artist, particularly her *Later Readings* exhibition from 2009. In this exhibition Fitton explored ways in which “shadows are coincidental with light and the surface of the world” while “acknowledg[ing] that there is more to light and shade than might be represented in an image” (Bremner n. pag.). We discussed possible points of departure for the project, exploring what was complementary in each other’s artistic practice and, as we did so, drafted criteria for the project’s poems. Suitable poems needed to be “1) imagistic” and “2) suggestive of light and shade.” We also agreed that poems “3) suggestive of, or naming, one or more colours” were likely to be appropriate for a project involving coloured digital imagery. We agreed that while poems for the project could be diverse, we would favour works that “4) opened out meanings and implications” (Fitton and Hetherington 1).

We also agreed that Fitton would create new digital images for the project and that while some images would be made to match already-written poems, in the majority of cases Hetherington would write new poems in response to Fitton’s imagery. We also formulated the following research question:

In what ways can largely abstract still digital imagery foregrounding light and shadow and characterised by significant indeterminacy be paired with lyric poetry to create mutually complementary patterns of verbal and visual suggestiveness, simultaneously extending the meanings of both works? (Fitton and Hetherington 2)

We decided to investigate this question through what might be termed a process of reciprocal and intuitive creativity.

Once we had decided on our research question, the title of our project came relatively quickly. We knew that we were looking for poems and images that connected with one another or which shared particular kinds of resemblances. However, we knew that, for the reasons discussed above, interart resemblances were sometimes problematic and incomplete. Typically, a lyric poem does not, after all, share many of the features of a visual image and, given the emphasis of our research question, resemblances between our images and poems were likely to be indeterminate, lateral and perhaps even elusive and insubstantial – more like an apparition than a solid reality. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition of "spectral" includes "2. Having the character of a spectre; ghostly, unsubstantial, unreal 1815" and "4. Produced merely by light on the eye or on a sensitive medium 1832" (Little, Fowler and Coulson 2068).

Hetherington's lyric poems often combine imagistic elements with elements of abstraction and narrative and we wanted to test how successfully poems that were either predominantly imagistic or which possessed a strong narrative strand – or both – might be paired with Fitton's images. The images themselves start out as digital photographs of naturally illuminated objects that capture transitory shapes created by intersections of shadow and light. In making the final works, small details from an image may be enlarged to make a new image, or images may be recoloured or overlaid with other images, or their tonal and textural qualities may be altered. The final results are sometimes weirdly abstract yet in a number of cases they also retain an eerie suggestion of something familiar. At other times they remain instantly recognisable but – at least to some extent – are defamiliarised by the process of their making.

Victor I. Stoichita's *A Short History of the Shadow* demonstrates how centrally shadows have been connected to the making of visual imagery. He writes that "The relationship with the origins (the relationship with the shadow) characterizes the history of Western representation" (8) and Fitton is particularly interested in how patterns and densities of shadow and shading, along with tonal effects created through

the manipulation of colour, are able to create certain effects of mood and various kinds of illusion, including the sometimes subtle illusion of three-dimensional volume. Fitton was also interested in exploring some of the ways in which, as Robert Smithson (162) writes, “abstraction brings one close to physical structures within nature itself” along with the comment he made in reference to his famous large-scale work, *Spiral Jetty*, that “Ambiguities are admitted rather than rejected; contradictions are increased rather than decreased – the *alogos* undermines the *logos*” (147).

One poem that we agreed would be included in our project was “Plumber.” It met all of the project criteria:

Plumber

Here is a bubbling drain
and a main adjoining pipe.
His eel wriggles towards
a cliff-face’s stain of seepage
into an ocean basin.
He stands facing the horizon.
There is blue wherever he looks –
even the horizon
is crossing out of purple,
as if sunset is siphoning day
into an estuary
on the other side
of his blinking observation.
He thinks of the vast flow,
the possible backwash,
the way he stands now in the offing
of that ensconced and draining light;
of his embayment
in the reaching, shallow glow,
its impressionistic shoal. (Hetherington, *Six Different Windows* 25)

This poem is imagistic and suggestive, it names colours and it is open rather than closed. Fitton’s lateral response to the poem takes as its point of departure the poem’s mention of a “cliff-face’s stain of seepage” and its preoccupation with blues and purples:



(Fitton, "Plumber" n. pag.)

While this image may be read as an illustration of "seepage," it also possesses its own, powerful suggestiveness. It intersects with the poem – but only partly and on its own terms – rather than illustrating it literally. It asks questions of the text because its emphasis and forcefulness are not fully congruent with the poem's element of almost diffuse impressionism and the manner in which the poem plays with the language of drains, shallows, bays and shoals.

Consequently, the poem and image enlarge each other's manner of speaking and ways of seeing, and supply a new emphasis or slant to the other's imagery. This creates a fruitful dialogue between the works that continues for as long as one reads and views the image and poem together. There is no way of resolving the simultaneously complementary and disjunctive effects that this pairing creates or – once the connection between works has been made – to easily set one work aside when reading or viewing the other. Such a pairing of works exemplifies the way in which this project creates a sense of charged, resonant space between image and poem – a connection that is fertile, suggestive and incomplete.

This is a space that, adapting Cathy Smith's term, might be called a between-ness – where the meanings engendered by the *combined effect* of image and poem reside. In discussing design practice and site-specific installation art, Smith writes of the

notion of conceptual between-ness; that which is neither one state nor the other but a zone of blurring in-between. An example of between-ness might be the rite of passage between child and adult [...] or a transformative experience provoked by an artwork. (131-2)

She places particular emphasis on “the interaction between people and the art space” (133) during sizeable art installations and while the activities of such people are different from the engagement of readers and viewers with poems and images, the idea of between-ness is useful in emphasising that such readers and viewers construct their own meanings as soon as they engage with the space between works. There are a multiplicity of possible meanings and interpretations generated in this conceptual space, consistent with Dario Gamboni's discussion of “potential images”: “those that depend on “the onlooker's state of mind” and come fully into being [...] only through the participation of the onlooker” (9).

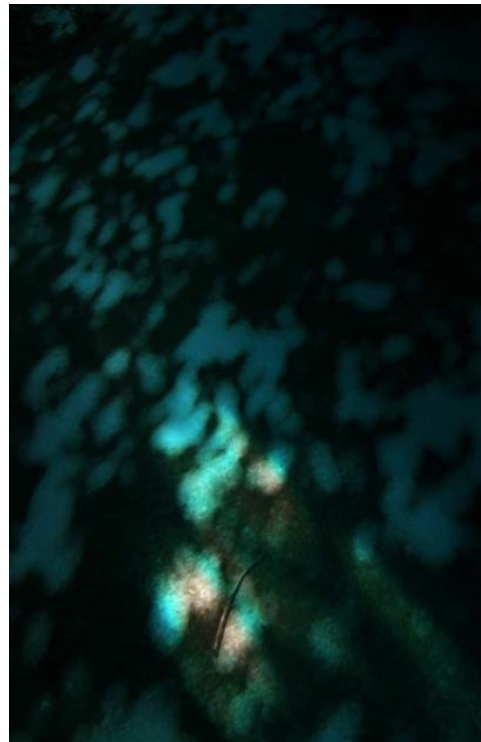
Fitton also generated a new image in response to a longer poem centred on the image of a pond:

The Pond

Where we fished, throwing lines across the water's skin
after dragging worms from soil to hook and twist;
where we sat talking of teachers;
where we dandled summer's asphalt-cracked feet
and thought reedy insects might crawl
through wounds into our bloodstream;
where we hooked fingers with girls,
wondering what to say
as damp climbed into our jeans;
where, once, a bottle was dropped
and the Italian wine or special massage oil
left a mark like a tomato on the concrete pavers
that blurred over time but never faded;
where we danced to music that we channeled from bedrooms
through a series of plastic pipes, losing most of the treble;

where you told me, yes,
you would be going overseas and not coming back;
where what was family pooled and was closely examined
through argumentative barbecues –
so that now, to conjure that place is impossible
and every later gathering is like something shaved
from the top surface of what we were
before we forgot ourselves. (Hetherington, *Six Different Windows* 16)

Fitton's image started as digital photograph of shadows on concrete and in manipulating the image she intensified its shadow effects while also altering its colour and tonality:



(Fitton, "The Pond" n. pag.)

The result is the illusion of a watery, leaf-littered, shadow-strewn pond or pool – or, certainly that's the general effect when the image is juxtaposed with the poem. Away from the poem, the image is suggestive of many possible meanings – and, to some extent, this play of possible meanings is

inherent in abstract visual imagery as compared to poems of the kind being written for this project. All of the poems contain some narrative content and are, to an extent, crafted to conform to a delimited “world” with its own internal logic. The images, being largely abstract, have a tendency to drift here and there in terms of their possible denotations. Overall, as with the image that accompanies the poem “Plumber,” the interart resemblance retains a sense of the elusive, and even of the fragile; a sitting-togetherness that, however apposite, is not fully and stably secured by the connotative complementarity of each work.

Another pairing of poem and image began with an image that Fitton created largely by manipulating effects of sunlight and shade. The result is highly abstracted and does not represent an identified place or scene. Instead, the contemplation of some of the extreme effects of darkness and light are the image’s main *raison d’être*:



(Fitton, “Cave Swimming” n. pag.)

This image prompted Hetherington to create a poem that would locate the image more clearly and precisely within a narrative framework. One of his aims was to ensure that the image remained able to float away from the

poem – neither too closely anchored to it nor entirely separated from it. This aim was facilitated by the fact that readers accept that the narratives found in lyric poems are often condensed and suggestive. Although the resultant poem asks the reader to consider whether the image may “illustrate” its narrative, there remains a sense that the image and poem are independent partners rather than – to pursue the metaphor of personal relationships – in any kind of formalised marriage.

Further, the poem was constructed to foreground what Peter Hühn and Jens Kiefer, in discussing narratology and the lyric, have called “the concepts of existent and incident” (5). They write that these elements in a lyric poem

make possible a detailed description of the level of happenings. An existent is a static element or something/someone related to an action (e.g. a character and its traits, location and so on) while an incident involves something dynamic (e.g. a change in properties or conditions, an occurrence, an action, and so on). Arranged in chronological order, the set of all existents and incidents constitutes the happenings that occur within the narrative world. In lyric poetry, happenings are frequently composed of mental or psychological processes. (5)

When the poem “Cave Swimming” is paired with Fitton’s image of the same name, her image, in Hühn and Kiefer’s terms, functions partly as an “existent” The poem further develops this “existent” in elaborating, for example, the “cave mouth’s glare.” The poem also provides an “incident” – in this case, the swimming that the poem evokes:

Cave Swimming

There was green
and, at my back,
a cave mouth’s glare
that whitened and bolded
my uncertain arms.
Efflorescences
like fugitive aloes
flitted and lifted
from Stygian water;
the roof’s honeycomb
was rebuffed and lost.

My feeble lamp
fingered its way
towards a small ladder
stuck in black rock –
a slapping stroke
for a thousand slow metres.
Light,
when it came
to the face of the water
was grace in the void. (Hetherington, “Cave Swimming” n. pag.)

The narrative introduced by the poem asks the reader/viewer to accord the image a specific denotative and illustrative dimension, yet the image remains as it was – neither entirely cave, nor sunlight, nor darkened water. The poem also invites the image to settle its meanings but the image can only yield to this invitation – and, even then, only partly – for the duration of the poem’s reading. Afterwards it begins to settle back into its own abstraction, at which stage we find that the “existent” was largely a creation of the juxtapositioning of image and poem – and of the use of the poem’s narrative as a way of “reading” and seeing the image. It is not so much that the juxtapositioning creates the meaning of poem or image, but that it re-inflects both, and seems to strengthen and solidify – and delimit – both, for the duration of the juxtaposed reading-and-seeing of the works.

Eight pairs of images and poems have been produced for this project to date, each pairing yielding different insights. All demonstrate that achieving fruitful and satisfactory combinations of digital image and lyric poem – each combination foregrounding light and shadow and characterised by significant indeterminacy – depend on finding complementary, unreductive and contingent relationships between images and poems.

There are no final meanings. Instead, there are explorations of creative complementarities and of the interplay between narrative possibilities and imagistic suggestiveness. This interplay is responsible for the sometimes strange chemistry that exists between what is apparently denotative and unambiguous – some strands of poetic narrative, for example – and what is connotative and to a significant extent indeterminate – for example, aspects of visual or poetic imagery. This

chemistry opens up new areas of possibility and suggestiveness in interpreting both poems and images.

Meaningful connections between the poetic works and visual images in this project are indeed “spectral.” These connections are never fully embodied in either work – or even in both works together – but are only able to be satisfactorily, if imperfectly, realised through contemplating the resonances that play back and forth in the between-ness of the conceptual spaces they create.

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